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SIPDIS

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FOR NEA/ARPI, LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV KU FREEDOM AGENDA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY](#)

SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: PARLIAMENT REVISES DATE FOR DEBATING  
AMMENDMENT OF ELECTORAL REDISTRICTING

REF: A) KUWAIT 601

B) 05 KUWAIT 5186 AND PREVIOUS

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¶1. (U) During its February 21 session, Parliament approved a motion to advance the date for debate of an Interior and Defense Affairs Committee proposal to reduce the number of electoral constituencies to April 17 from June 30 as previously agreed (reftel). Initially, the Government opposed the motion, but changed its position under pressure from some Ministers, particularly Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah, and after a decision by Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammed Al-Sabah to re-assess the issue. At one point, the Ministers of Information and Communications left the National Assembly hall to avoid voting against the parliamentary motion.

¶2. (U) The previous Government had voted to postpone the issue until June; however, during the February 21 session, Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser asked Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Mohammed Sharar to re-assess the delay and then stated his support for a prompt debate of the issue. With the support of the new Government, the motion was approved: 33 of the 46 members of Parliament (MPs) present voted for it, 12 MPs voted against it, and one abstained. (Note: There are currently 65 members of Parliament: 49 elected MPs and 16 Government Ministers, who are ex officio MPs. End note.)

¶3. (U) MPs supporting the motion applauded the "realistic step" taken by the Prime Minister and vowed to support the Government if it was serious about reform. The first step on the path of reform starts with overhauling the electoral system, they emphasized.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The vote could be an early indicator that the new Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammed, is serious about implementing key reforms, long stalled in Parliament (ref A). The Interior and Defense Affairs Committee, which is dominated by MPs believed to oppose amendment of the electoral system, must still finalize its proposal to reduce the number of electoral constituencies, something it has been dragging its feet on for some time. Even if it does meet the April 17 deadline (it failed to meet the last two deadlines), there is still considerable disagreement in Parliament over the geographic distribution of the fewer districts, which would have significant political ramifications. Nonetheless, yesterday's vote was a move in the right direction. End comment.

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